

# BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Order Instituting Rulemaking Into Implementation of Federal Communications Commission Report and Order 04-87, as It Affects the Universal Lifeline Telephone Service Program.

Rulemaking 04-12-001 (Filed December 2, 2004)

REPLY COMMENTS OF SAN DIEGO GAS & ELECTRIC COMPANY AND SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GAS COMPANY TO PARTIES' COMMENTS ON THE ASSIGNED COMMISSIONER'S RULING SETTING SCOPE OF PHASE 2 ON IMPROVING THE CALIFORNIA LIFELINE CERTIFICATION AND VERIFICATION PROCESSES

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#### **INTRODUCTION:**

San Diego Gas & Electric Company (SDG&E) and Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas) (collectively, "the Joint Utilities) appreciate the opportunity to offer Reply Comments regarding the Assigned Commissioner's Ruling dated November 14, 2007, Setting Scope of Phase 2 on Improving the California Lifeline Certification and Verification Processes. The Joint Utilities received Opening Comments from Verizon, AT&T California, Cox California, SureWest Telephone, et.al, The Utility Reform Network (TURN), et.al, and the Division of Ratepayer Advocates (DRA). The Joint Utilities provide the following Reply Comments on coordinating enrollment with other Commission low-income programs and limiting qualification to program-based eligibility, and provide further clarification on the California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) and Low Income Energy Efficiency (LIEE) programs' self-certification and documentation requirements.

#### **REPLY COMMENTS:**

#### **Synergies with Other Commission Low-Income Programs**

Several of the parties' comments pointed out that there are various differences between the Commission's low-income programs that make it complicated to achieve synergies. Verizon pointed out that some programs allow for self-certification which is against FCC rules. Turn, et. al., mentions the "divergent eligibility guidelines" of the programs, and AT&T adds that the CARE program, unlike the California Lifeline program, is available to non-residential customers and is administered differently than the California Lifeline. The Joint Utilities agree with those comments and with the Opening Comments of AT&T California and DRA that in order to properly evaluate whether synergies can be developed amongst California Lifeline and other Commission regulated programs, the Commission should consider input from all industries in a separate proceeding that crosses the industries. The Joint Utilities support having the Commission open a separate proceeding and/or conducting workshops with all the industries and interested parties on the issue of achieving synergies amongst all Commission regulated lowincome programs.

#### **Program-Based Eligibility**

AT&T argues that allowing for a strictly program-based eligibility would improve the enrollment process for the California Lifeline program and that the need for income-based eligibility will decrease over time "as customers recognize the convenience of certifying under program-based criteria." They also suggest that in order to retain the subscription rate in the instance the income-base criteria is eliminated, the Commission should consider expanding the list of government programs. The Joint Utilities do not agree that this is the best means of maintaining subscriptions in the California Lifeline program. It suggests that customers will be lost if eligibility is strictly program-based and offers a solution not previously considered on record. Also, AT&T does not suggest what, if any, additional programs may be eligible for California Lifeline.

Verizon argues that a program-based eligibility will promote administrative simplicity, reduce bad debt costs, and help those without income documentation. The Joint Utilities believe

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Pp. 6-7.

that the current enrollment process does assist those without income documentation by allowing enrollment based on participation in other public assistance programs. However, by removing the income eligibility component of qualifying customers for California Lifeline, damage may be done to those customers who do not participate in any of the other public assistance programs. On the other hand Cox, TURN et.al, SureWest et.al, and DRA favor continuance of dual eligibility which allows for program-based eligibility and income eligibility reaching all customers. The Joint Utilities agree with TURN et.al, SureWest et.al, and DRA that income-eligibility be retained as a means of qualifying for Lifeline and reiterate their position that low-income customers who can income qualify for the California Lifeline program should not be prevented from obtaining the services because they are not participating in other means-tested programs.

#### **CARE** and LIEE Self-Certification and Documentation

Verizon states on pg. 9 of their comments that the CARE and LIEE programs are all based on self-certification of income. To clarify, CARE qualification is either based on self-certification of participation in a means-tested public assistance program or self-certification of income with income verification (a request for documentation of income) conducted randomly on customers after enrollment in the CARE program has been completed. LIEE, however, allows for qualification based on documented evidence of participation in a means-tested public assistance program or documentation of income eligibility, except in geographical areas targeted by the utility. Self-certification is accepted for these geographical areas because the demographics of the areas indicate that customers residing in those areas meet the LIEE program's income eligibility guidelines. Also, LIEE applicants who have verified their eligibility for CARE through the program's verification process are automatically deemed income-eligible for the LIEE program since CARE and LIEE have identical income eligibility guidelines.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The Joint Utilities look forward to taking part in a new proceeding and/or workshops to address the issues keeping all of the Commission regulated low income programs from moving forward and developing synergies amongst them.

Respectfully submitted by:

/s/ Kim F. Hassan

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#### **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that a copy of REPLY COMMENTS OF SAN DIEGO GAS & ELECTRIC COMPANY AND SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GAS COMPANY TO PARTIES' COMMENTS ON THE ASSIGNED COMMISSIONER'S RULING SETTING SCOPE OF PHASE 2 ON IMPROVING THE CALIFORNIA LIFELINE CERTIFICATION AND VERIFICATION PROCESSES has been electronically mailed to each party of record of the service list in R.04-12-001. Any party on the service list who has not provided an electronic mail address was served by placing copies in properly addressed and sealed envelopes and by depositing such envelopes in the United States Mail with first-class postage prepaid.

Copies were also sent via Federal Express to Administrative Law Judge Karen Jones and Commissioner Dian Grueneich.

Executed this 8th day of January, 2008 at San Diego, California.

/s/ Jenny Tjokro
Jenny Tjokro



### CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

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**LAST CHANGED: JANUARY 2, 2008** 

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